

SAVING LILIA JEAN'S CRY



The Unmarked Grave



Pa crossing and attaching two sticks

Pa said, as we approached a clearing, "...That's a special place for me over there..." as he motioned over the way, and then as we approached a certain spot he continued, "...I come here to think..." I saw nothing especially appealing. A relatively barren spot at the edge of a thicket meant little, then, but too little did I realize that his sentence would continue nearly a half-century later.

Leading the way he and Punkin, the dog, paused at slightly higher ground on the other side of a gully. I paused too, and in that brief breather he stood as if to say, "Listen, hear it!...there it is, there, that silence". The place hardly measured up to my location-location-location standards. In retrospect now I see quite clearly the significance of the apparent loyalty to that locale. That side of the gully faced south, was properly drained, exposed to the rare Michigan sun, and shielded however slightly from north wintry winds. And it was private, still, lonesome to a fault, and as far as possible from cultivated areas and near the back of the farm beside an un-pastured wood's thicket. The ground would be some of the first to shed snow in the spring thaws. In the fall when leaves had dropped on the south side it would absorb what little was available from the winter's

sun. And...being well drained it could be easier for seeds to break ground. It would thaw first after a heavy freeze in the winter or defrost in the autumn after a hard freeze—especially if an Indian summer happened by like it had for this day.

My response, I now realize, was shallow compared to the depth of Pa's buried feelings: "My favorite spot is over the fence in our woods on the other side...right next to the Lumbard fence. The ground is covered with soft moss and there's a heavy vine hanging in the tree good for swinging. In all the woods around here it's the only place with that one large jungle-like vine, and it and the tree seemed to have come to some mutual understanding." We were family-taught that there was no such word as woods, and a farm's source of wood for fuel was "wood", though we would in everyday-terms say "woods" in the sense of "trees" rather than "tree" (Old English wudu and Welsh gwydd meaning trees). Oh, by the way, my name is Glenn Wood, named after my Paternal Grandfather, Clark, which is my middle name.

But only Pa, Clarence, was a woodsman in the true sense of the word and knew his way around. So all I would need to have said was, "You know, where the big hanging vine is", and he could have described it with more botanical accuracy. He would not get lost in the densest of the north Michigan forests, had two different colored eyes, colorblind in one, and he could see through a darkness through which I could only feel. He could well-witch the depths and not only pinpoint subterranean watercourses but also estimate its depth by the size of the blisters caused by the tightly held fiber-splitting-twisting forked branch. He preferred a "peach-tree branch" but willow worked too though it would not dramatize his 'science' with blisters. Nobody who saw it ridiculed the phenomenon. I would not think it an awesome miraculous thing, and eventually wondered what sub-atomic, molecular, and chemical processes were involved; why he had what it took on his end of the family

spectrum and how would one describe this attraction between Pa and the terrain's substratum. If there was a science to the angle of grasp relative to the twisting leverage of the branch, I could not do it. Moreover, this 'science' was undesirable if developing a talent depended somehow on exercising a broken heart in deep search of mending.

Besides lacking curb appeal, Pa's contemplative spot was not now even on our farm. The supposedly thought-provoking patch was on the farm sold by my paternal grandparents to Bill Harper, who developed the Houserville John Deere dealership. Houserville used to be on the road maps of the forties and fifties. My maternal grandfather, Walter Cook, named those four corners. Besides having been married four times, he was a carpenter and painter. When he finished painting the country store for the Housers, having a lighthearted gusto for life, as a gag he painted "Houserville" in black on the white building. It stood out and stuck long enough to appear on the official road maps—at least the ones I saw in my early days of driving. The local Grange Hall (Patrons of Husbandry founded in 1867) occupied one corner, another corner the one-room Arcada Township Davis grade school where I attended, and where for some time my Aunt Bernice, Pa's sister, taught. The east and south side of the schoolhouse was also the corner of that part of the Wood estate—the Ely highway separated the estate. Another corner was occupied by that country store. The store-corner later became Bill Harper's John Deere dealership. Mechanics Orville Goodman and Max Houston once slipped small yellow John Deere decals on both sides of my black 1937 Ford. The fourth corner was farmland, part of the farm we once owned, and Pa's "special spot" was at the back of the 80 acres. This was my upbringing environmental hub, a portal about which in part I pivoted and from which I spun far a field.

We were at the special place because earlier that November Indian-summer morning—a northern hemisphere period of sunny autumn weather—Pa had done something unusual. He asked me if I wanted to go hunting with him. It was an unusual invite for I got no enjoyment out of killing anything, did not like hunting, though when a child I went with my father on a few occasions. He was a quick and deadly shot with his lever action 12-gauge (nickel-size) shotgun—so was Grandpa with his pump action 12 gauge, but the latter suffered from shoulder problems. Squirrels were quickly put out of misery by a hard swing of the head against a tree. Hunting activity could easily be justified as a food supplement, and the trekking and search could be made the best of. Pa's kindheartedness though superseded his reputation as a quick and accurate shooter.

My personal hunting experience had no positives. One warm fall day, another Indian summer, during hunting season I decided to go to the wood, that is, woods. (Gwydd/wodu does in no way support a feeling of an egomaniacal expertise as a naturalist; it's an oxymoron compared to Pa's oneness with and in the woods.)—oh ya, a family friend, Willard Allen, had loaned me the 20-gauge (penny-size) single-shot. When I was five years old—in Alabama—he had made a couple red-rubber slingshots and gave me one. Those two weapons, one given and the other loaned, have aided in the recall of these events.

Hoping for nothing but the good fortune of not having the opportunity to kill anything, I laid back on some autumn leaves in a bit of sunlit clearing and soon heard something prancing through the leaves. I looked to my right face to face with the largest squirrel ever seen in my world. It threatened me with a lot of scolding, and scampered up a tree too tiny to hide behind or in—a diameter of two or three inches. It climbed out on a small limb and continued threatening. I reached for the shotgun aimed and fired at the critter. Less than twenty feet away and about ten feet off the ground, the wounded animal clung to the limb, so I loaded and fired again—Now on the ground though still squirming,

like Pa would, I grabbed it by the end of the tail and swung, but the tail broke off. So I pumped one more shot to finally end the prolonging misery—pain that I had caused with groundless malice and shallower intent. Heading up the lane toward home I was far from a proud food hunter. The hunt's spoil was handed to my mother; she wearily looked and said that there was not much left but lead. That was the beginning and ending of my hunting efforts.



So Pa's invitation to go hunting was not all that appealing. There were other experiences fundamental to my aversion to hunting. My father was also a preacher and served as minister to the Coe Church of Christ for nearly a decade and a half. One Sunday after church my mother was swatting flies in the kitchen. She actually laughed—seldom enough for me to remember the times she did—when I asked her if flies should be killed on Sunday. Later, when hearing his brother-in-law, Levi, speak about being out of favor with his church for hunting and working on Sunday, my dad responded jestingly: “Better the day, better the deed!” Pa was only heard to say it once but it stuck on my mind like “HOUSERVILLE” stuck on Houser's store. Though a preacher and not ordained by an established denomination this sort of homespun philosophical attitude in part made him acceptable to reasonable people.

My attitude toward recreational hunting had been modified by some serious trauma that's worth telling about. An elder in the Church by the name of Ray Leonard was an avid deer hunter, and he had a large family to feed. He was shot and killed while hunting. At the time, World War II, he had at least two sons in the military. There were several in uniform from the Coe church: my future brother-in-law, Lyle, for one, his brother, Bill, too, and several others. One of the Curtis boys was killed in action. I can still see his picture that was placed on the communion table for the memorial-funeral service. Pa did the service. And...oh yes...he had the funeral for the young Curtis girl, Betty,

who died of a ruptured appendix—a real memorial service to be referred to later in this book. I was probably around 12, and still remember and think of her whenever I hear the hymn *At Calvary*. I can still see and hear her mother mourningfully saying: “...it was her favorite hymn.” The soloist was Bill Leonard’s beautiful wife Lenora (Stahl) and Ma (prematurely wrinkling) accompanied on the piano. Lenora also served as song leader in the regular church service. Lenora and Bill were an ideal couple until death bid them part.

Ray was a good hunter and would usually bring home much needed venison. But there was some risk, for it was not unusual for a dozen or so hunters to die by gunshot during hunting season in Michigan. On the first day of hunting season in the upper part of Lower Michigan, north of Claire, it could sound a bit like a battleground’s front lines. My brother Raymond and Pa actually engaged in a brief shotgun duel with some other hunters once. Noticing some hunters near, to avoid them, Pa and Raymond walked into a high-growth swamp. Then they heard the shotgun pellets cutting through the thicket, near enough and soon enough so that they intuited that it was not an accident. My brother reeled about and returned the shot pellets. On another occasion Pa was actually wounded by a hunting and careless stranger—well, a few of the birdshot bee-bees from the blast penetrated the heavy clothing. There was a fine family named Chaney in the Coe farming and church community but none were involved in this incident. Ray’s event was commemorative. Ray had a large family. There were 14 children.

At around the age of ten I was attracted to one of his daughters—during the first Sunday that my father preached at Coe, she and either a Chaney or Stahl girl had girlishly plunked themselves directly in the pew in front of me. Huddling together they were eagerly fidgeting with something, and suddenly Lula (or “Ula”) turned around, smiled and gave me a stick of gum. She was cute and as shy-less as the number of brothers she had. I was in love for

the first time—though I'd had dreams of a beautiful innocent girl, my primary love, coming from the midst of the hollyhock and sunflower patch beside the house. The burial site for her father was about a mile and half from the Church building. When traffic entered the cemetery it was



Ma, Raymond, Ramona, me, and the Shepherd home

still leaving the packed Church parking lot. There was a lot of weeping. I observed, saddened, but not weeping. In my young mind Ray was a perfect specimen of a mature church elder.

Ray was one of three who visited my father—the very spot where they stood I could take you to now—a home visit that led to Pa's ministry at Coe. It was an unannounced visit, and Pa was appealingly attired, an unashamed workman as any sweaty and dirty farmer would be—in that day—on his way back to the fields. We, i.e., the preacher and his family, had supped with the Ray Leonard household on a few occasions. We kids rode the workhorse, and played in their parked Model T Ford—and that steering wheel smell assists the memory too.

I can still hear Ray at the communion table asking for God's blessing on the emblematic cup and bread as the Lord's sacrifice was remembered. But during the last home-visitation, Ray was emblematically laying in the casket in the dimly lit living room. I remember wondering how impossible it would be for me to sleep for those few days in that home and awakening every so often, and waiting for reality to return in the form of: "Thank goodness, it was only a nightmare"...only to sleep again when bereavement reaches the critical point of exhaustion.

There was much weeping too at another funeral at which my father officiated. A teenage boy while hunting had attempted to cross a log and his shotgun discharged into his groin and stomach. After several days in the hospital he passed away. Though the name is momentarily and shamefully forgotten I can still hear his younger brother's long pauses for breath between crying episodes.



So, going back to another unusual hunting day when I agreed to go with Pa and tried to conceal my lack of enthusiasm much of which was absorbed by Punkin's tail's eagerness: Though beautiful weather for that Michigan season, it still meant strolling through weeds gone to seed, some falling into shoes, and cockleburs penetrating garments and agitating the skin.

I reminded Pa that we did not have an extra shotgun. We had a 30-30 rifle but its use was limited to northern wooded areas. I had had a single-shot 22 rifle, but it was not safe. I cut it down and made it more like a pistol. Once while running toward the barn it discharged and barely missed my foot. My cousin, Joey Cook, from Detroit during a visit asked me if he could have it. He took it. Later I wondered if I had been instrumental in introducing one of the first zip guns into the asphalt jungle. So I went without a shotgun, rifle, or that cut-down thing. Pa had that rapid shooting level action shotgun.

At that time I had availed myself of certain paid-for-tuition opportunities and was preparing for the ministry—and at a time too when I was not averse to avoiding the Korean Police Action. I mean nothing was planned in the way of draft-avoidance as such but I got in position where constellations just seemed to align themselves. Anyway, I was asked to accompany Pa in part probably as a seminarian more than a hunting partner. Obviously this was not the usual hunters' preying for game or easy victims. I sensed something that prevented me from declining the invitation.



Henrietta's farm--to become the Wood estate south of Harner's

The Wood estate then included the 80 acres adjacent to the Harper farm, which had been the old Wood estate. My paternal Grandparents had traded their home in Alma in part for the old Wood farm. The Alma home was purchased because Grandpa had found employment at the Republic Factory in Alma where military trucks were made for the World War I effort. The farm now owned and hunted on was left to my Grandparents for providing care for Henrietta Kirby, a daughter of an Irish immigrant family that managed to escape the potato famine in Ireland. This early pioneer would tell of Native American Indians, Chippewa, camping at the far end of the farm in the wood. The Indian campsite was in the direction that Pa and I walked, toward the edge of the wood where there were three apple trees. One was especially good and near a large old oak. That location too was at the edge of another natural drainage ditch on the northeast side of the farm.

Pa, Punkin, and I crossed over the fence separating the Harper/Wood farm and ours. We were heading for the “special place” an area about 600 feet onto the Harper farm. I remember the point where we crossed, for it was near there that once as a kid looking for target practice I took aim at a Buzzard near the spot where Pa and I were heading. The bird was perched high in a tree. Thinking it was out of range for a 22 short-shell—I forget whether I used a short or long—the shot was deemed a mere ritual. I shot and the buzzard jumped off the limb, flapped once, and without further fluttering plummeted straight down into or

behind undergrowth. At first I thought the bird had been frightened by the noise, and then wondered if, and even hoped that it was too sick rather than too shot to fly.

I felt guilty; one reason being that no reasonable person shot buzzards for they were part of the eco-natural-cycle system. It was not my goal to cause it misery, but that was exactly the result of that urge to shoot. We might occasionally leave a farm animal's body, like a calf, in the woods to feed the scavengers and thereby avoid digging too. We could haul it to the woods and leave it for a King-James biblical eagle-eco burial, you know that part about where some were putting too much emphasis on the corpse side of life (corporeal) that led Jesus to say, "thither will the eagles be gathered together" (Luke 17:37)—but there I go speaking seminarian. I'll try to avoid that wherever...impractical.

The more I wondered about the buzzard the greater the guilt, and uncertainty took the form of a question as to whether it might have been an eagle of the soaring and preying sort. I walked over there and made a halfhearted effort to find the bird; finding the poor bird would mean another attempt at mercy killing—a doubly difficult thing to do with a 22 bullet (it seems the last shell had been used). I remembered once that Ma mentioned needing a chicken to cook, and Raymond volunteered to shoot a chicken. He took the shotgun, shot and grazed the crop and as corn started dropping onto the ground the chicken while happily clucking would have stood there all day eating. Needless to say the episode was more than what Raymond planned for.

And the buzzard had fallen into an area where I could be observed, and seen as the person that shot the bird if someone happened to have looked after hearing the shot, and seeing the bird fall. In other words I was carrying a gun on someone else's property and probably out of season. But Going over to look into the thick brush where the bird would have landed I must have walked, then, for the first time very near the spot that was special to Pa. I had not shared this episode with anyone till now, and didn't

mention it during this trek with Pa. Pa did not need further information to enhance past reasons for given this PK (preacher's kid) a higher disapproval rate.

Little did I grasp how incomparable was my buzzard-guilt to Pa's regarding events leading to, growing from, encompassing, and emanating from that...location. The proper normal communicative response on my part at the time would have been to ask why that location was so special to him. If then I did not have the level of empathy to pause in wisdom waiting for more talk, Pa was not going to risk burdening me with something so phenomenally significant in his life—and eventually to my life and that of significant others alive then and those to come. So, though he wanted to share something with me that would contribute to my understanding, it was not worth the risk of annihilating me or distracting from my studies. He might have thought my attention span was too short anyway for something that involved. There was a time and place, but probably this place was not the time for the rest of the story.

Our trek took place at the time when I was being cautiously observant knowing that Pa had reasons to be depressed. It was the period when my approaches to the barn were accompanied by apprehension or even trepidation not knowing what might be...hanging...in there. He had been perplexed and depressed for some time. Pa, though independently religious, was a pragmatic rationalist too. Suicide was not a moral issue in the least, and within the mile square there had been three suicides during the time of my upbringing—one whose religion taught it was a mortal sin and I don't think there was enough family-resource for absolution. In Pa's thinking, suicide would not be a "sin" but it would be indicative of a short-circuited lack of faith in life's reason. The short-circuit could be caused by foreign interferences in the form of religion, culture, and mental and/or physical disease. From a normal rational perspective it could be a test of one's immediate impulsive nerve or a trial of one's neural tolerance for pain.

Left, room where
Henrietta passed.
Right, back porch
door



The atmosphere had been unusually charged, and perhaps there was something he wanted to share on this day. It could be sensed in my concerns about his mental state—after delivering some bad news to him in the field, to which he responded, “Well, life is over for me!” I knew he meant it at least for the several emerging moments. In the overall longer moment he was contemplative, philosophically buoyant. Within that same hour, while following him out the back door he turned just as I noticed that the shotgun was out of place, too handy, too near the outer porch door. He turned as though suddenly remembering it was placed handy and too conspicuous; simultaneously I looked down the steps and our eyes met, and though I said nothing, he said: “Ya, it’s not the first time that I took it to the barn... but lost my nerve.”



Ma has box on lan and cross is placed

I didn’t believe for a moment that he had lost his nerve, but rather had held on to his faith, the faith now challenged again, a faith which included consideration for the family’s material and no less emotional provisions. This concern for the family was fundamental to his comment’s meaning about life being “over for me”. But this was another higher level of intensity; the sort that

led me to say that I would see to Ma, and that he was not to do anything foolish. He assured me he would not. But Ma, about an hour ahead of me, was a good shot too, admirably adroit, and chronically and deeply hurting...and heading north, alone, to the cabin in the forest near Mancelona. There was no speed limit in Michigan at the time, and I had a new 1955 Mercury that would do nearly 100 and I had to get to the Cabin, back home, and then back to work at the GE plant in Edmore for the night shift.

Though this crises was sometime before our hunting trip to Pa's special place, it is vitally linked, and that in part is what Pa with me wanting to come to terms.

Oh, yes, and Pa's special place in the woods was uniquely special to Ma too.